

Samuel T. Hauser House
720 Madison Avenue
Helena
Lewis and Clark County
Montana

HABS No. MT-23

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SAMUEL T. HAUSER HOUSE

HABS No. MT-23

ADDRESS: 720 Madison Avenue, Helena, Lewis and Clark County, Montana.

OWNER: Diocese of Helena

OCCUPANT: Catholic Convent

USE: Convent

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Samuel T. Hauser went up the Missouri River in 1862, to the head of navigation, Ft. Benton, Montana, intending to cross from there to the gold fields in Idaho. Strikes at Gold Creek and Bannack in Montana caused him to change his plans, and he remained in the Territory to become one of its most prominent citizens. Banking, mining, railroads, smelting and livestock raising were among his interests.

President Cleveland appointed Samuel T. Hauser as Territorial Governor of Montana in July, 1885. He was the first Montana Territorial Governor to be a resident of the Territory; his predecessors had been men from the States sent out to govern the new area. He served until February, 1887.

This residence of Governor Samuel T. Hauser was completed about the time he took office, and was the scene of governmental social functions as well as private ones.

Coincidentally, Mrs. S. T. Hauser, the wife of a man who was one of the developers of Montana, was the granddaughter of the sister of William Clark, one of the leaders of the Lewis and Clark expedition that first opened the territory by its exploration.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Samuel T. Hauser was born in Falmouth, Kentucky, on January 10, 1833. June, 1862, found him at Gold Creek just as gold fever activity was beginning in Montana. Hauser sailed up the river with some friends to Fort Benton, later planning to cross over to the gold fields in Idaho. The discoveries being made in Montana caused him to change his plans.

The summer of 1833 was the summer that the big gold strike on Grasshopper Creek was made, and the town of Bannack sprang up. Hauser spent the winter of 1862-63 in Bannack, a wild and lawless mining town. In the spring, Hauser joined the Yellowstone Expedition, composed of men who had failed to get paying claims on Grasshopper Creek and who organized to prospect the Yellowstone Valley. They spent two months exploring without success. An Indian attack drove them back to Bannack after several of the party had been killed. The party passed near Alder Gulch, but passed it by, and another group made the big strike while they were on the Yellowstone.

Hauser moved to Virginia City, the town spawned by the Alder Gulch strike. In the fall of 1863, he was one of the contributors to the fund to send a man to Washington to obtain Territory status for the area.

As the Montana Territory prospered, banks became necessary to facilitate business dealings. N. P. Langford and S. T. Hauser formed a partnership in 1865 and opened a bank in Virginia City which they named S. T. Hauser & Co. This was the beginning of Hauser's connection with banks. The next year, on March 17, 1866, the First National Bank of Helena was chartered, with Hauser as its president. In the same year he organized the St. Louis Mining Co. at Philipsburg, where he erected the first silver mill in the Territory.

Other Hauser enterprises were the First National Bank of Butte, the First National Bank of Fort Benton, and the First National Bank of Missoula.

With associates, he built several railroads between Montana cities and organized the Helena and Livingston Smelting and Reduction company.

As president of the First National Bank of Helena and involved in many varied Territorial enterprises, Samuel T. Hauser was one of the most influential citizens of Montana. There was general satisfaction when President Grover Cleveland appointed him Territorial Governor in 1885. He became the first resident Territorial Governor; his predecessors had been sent from the east to rule this western territory. He served as governor until February, 1887.

Hauser was a respected and popular governor, and during the Christmas season, 1885, Hauser Havana cigars, bearing a likeness of the governor, were among the gift items available to Helena shoppers.

This house was built about the time Hauser assumed the governor's office, and was the scene of many sparkling social functions. The architect is unknown; however, in 1890 architects Paulsen and McConnell are reported to have remodeled it.

Mrs. Samuel T. Hauser was the granddaughter of William Clark's sister, his grandneice. Clark was one of the leaders of the Lewis and Clark expedition which opened the way for the development of Montana.

Hauser's residence passed to his daughter, Ella Hauser Thatcher, then to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Helena in 1914. It is now used as a convent.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL AND REFERENCES

- Hamilton, James M., From Wilderness to Statehood,
Binfords & Mort, Portland, 1957.
Helena Weekly Herald (newspaper), Helena, Montana,
1885-87.
Helena Illustrated, Frank L. Thresher, publ. by
author, Minneapolis, 1890.
Lewis and Clark County Deed Records, Books 72-75,
Helena, Montana, 1913-14.

Miller, Joaquin, An Illustrated History of the State of Montana, Lewis Publishing Co., Chicago, 1894.

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

This building, one of the finest of many elegant mansions in Helena, has belonged to the Catholic Church since 1914. The second and third floors have been extensively altered to serve the needs of a convent. Only the exterior, the grounds, the grand staircase and the first floor retain their original charm. The elaborate mouldings, wood wainscot and overall size prove a daily cleaning task to the nuns, as well as being difficult to heat and maintain.

EXTERIOR

Overall Dimensions - 63' x 77', three stories with a full basement.

Foundation - native granite.

Wall Construction - brick bearing wall construction above the stone foundation-basement (partially exposed).

Porches - two wood porches with wooden columns; one across the front of the building and the other along the north side.

Openings - Entrance: two large oak doors having a rectangular stained glass transom above.

Windows: D.H. 1/1 wood windows with arched heads; some have rectangular stained glass transoms; other window types vary from dormer units to fixed units; others with frosted glass to D.H. units. The staircase has (on the north elevation) a 9 panel unit consisting of 3 wood and 6 stained glass units. A small room on the second floor serves today as a chapel and has two stained glass windows that present St. John and St. Margaret.

Roof - steep gable, approximately 45° pitch.
Roof covering - wood shakes.

Chimneys - brick.

INTERIOR

Only the first floor retains most of its original design. The second and third floors have been extensively altered.

Floor Plan - Passing through the double oak doors, one enters a small vestibule that has double panel doors, each having a single stained glass light that separates the entry from the grand hall.

The grand hall has a hardwood wainscot of recessed panels that carries up the staircase. In the entry there is a marble fireplace on the north wall near the staircase.

To the left of the entry is the parlor in the northeast corner of the building. Behind this is the dining room, then the kitchen and pantry. A new back entry has been added. From the kitchen area a backstairs or servants' stairs originally led to the servants' quarters above.

On the south side of the entry was the sitting room and beyond the library or den. Each of the four major first floor rooms and the grand hall have a fireplace; all five fireplaces have tiled hearths.

The second floor is reached by a paneled staircase. The balustrade is oak and the wainscot carries up to the second floor landing. An intermediate landing is lighted by the stained glass windows mentioned earlier. Just at the head of the stairs, toward the east, is a north room above the dining room that today serves as a small chapel for the nuns.

Access was not gained to the remainder of the second floor, nor to the third floor, since these are the sleeping quarters of the nuns. From early accounts and photographs, the second floor housed the bedrooms of Governor and Mrs. Hauser, guest bedrooms, bath and servants' quarters. The third floor served as a grand ballroom and recreational area.

Stairway - open stairs, oak balustrade & carved newel post; hardwood wainscot to the second floor. Less formal stairs (above) to the third floor.

Floor - parquet hardwood floor in the grand hall. Oak floor, T & G; carpets throughout, except in the servants' quarters where T & G pine was used.

Wall and Ceiling Finish - plaster; some wallpaper. Wainscot in the main hall; here the plaster is textured.

Doors - panel hardwood doors except in servants' quarters.

Trim - elaborately moulded oak trim, except painted pine in servants' quarters.

Hardware - brass in main part of the house, cast iron elsewhere.

Lighting - gas lighted; now electric.

Heating - steam, assisted originally by the fireplaces.

OTHERS

General Setting - The building occupies a prominent southeast location in the residential area of Helena and is oriented eastward at the corner of Madison Ave. and Stuart St. The lot has numerous fine stately trees.

Enclosure- stone retaining walls on the front (east) and north side.

Outbuildings- A one story brick carriage house, 30'x12', sits directly behind the main building.

Report prepared by: John DeHaas
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